

## Iraq War vet discusses his toughest fight

Dubuque Telegraph Herald - Congressman Braley interviews New Vienna native about his wartime experiences and his precarious emotional state after leaving the field of battle.

New Vienna, Iowa, veteran Jake Krapfl told a poignant story in the book "Shadows of War," a fictional account based on his experiences, including contemplating suicide, after serving two tours in Iraq.

On Wednesday morning, Krapfl recorded his story for the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project.

U.S. Rep. Bruce Braley, D-Iowa, interviewed Krapfl, 26, who served with the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, at Dubuque American Legion Post 6 headquarters.

The project makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans and U.S. citizen civilians who were actively involved in supporting war efforts so future generations may hear directly from the men and women, and better understand the realities of war.

Krapfl described his experiences -- before, during and after Iraq. Braley asked Krapfl about training for IEDs (improvised explosive devices), a popular enemy weapon in Iraq.

The only way to train is "to see, experience and work with" the IEDs, he said.

Krapfl told of a close call with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) while on patrol in November 2003.

"You can hear them, like a freight train or a fighter jet," he said. The RPG missed his vehicle by 3 feet, "all because the (shooter) breathed wrong before he pulled the trigger."

During his two tours (between September 2003 and March 2005), Krapfl forged many relationships.

"I consider the men I served with closer than the members of my family," he said. "We went through hell together, and we brought each other home. They were willing to lay down their lives for me."

There were light moments in Iraq. Krapfl recalled conducting a traffic stop in Baghdad so 20 high school girls could cross a busy highway. The locals do it for boys, not girls.

"It was the first time they were treated as equals," he said, smiling. "We wanted to show them we treat our women as equals."

Krapfl described the August day in 2007 and how his life changed.

"I got home and started making plans to 'fix' my depression, and the only way out was suicide," he said. "I was so close to the edge. The shotgun was loaded with one round. I was ready to go."

A phone call from Krapfl's father, David, triggered a call to the Iowa City Department of Veterans Affairs hospital. It was the start of a new chapter.

"It's been a crooked road that's got me this far," said Krapfl, who plans to be a teacher. "Right now, what I have going on in my life, I have a wonderful family, a wonderful wife."

Krapfl welcomed the opportunity to tell his story.

"It was a chance to share my experiences, and more important to that if someone else is faced with dealing with what I overcame, I wanted them to know that they are not alone," he said. Project interviews span the generations.

"We try to do these across the age range, and that's why hearing Jacob's story today was so significant because he represents the most current generation of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan," Braley said. "I always feel like I'm the one who gets the most out of these interviews."

The lawmaker conducted interviews in Dubuque, Waterloo, Anamosa and Davenport.

"Because I've spent a lot of my life interviewing people, this is something that comes naturally to me," said Braley, who speaks to veterans' services organizations about the importance of preserving the stories. "I haven't done a single interview where I haven't been changed by the stories that I've heard."